
The auction house, Christie's, says the sale of a painting by the Indian artist, Francis Newton Souza, has set a record for an Indian work of art. Souza's 1955 painting, Birth, was sold for more than \$2.5m. From our South Asia desk, Jason Caffrey reports:

A Christie's official said the sale of Francis Newton Souza's oil painting, Birth, had **set a world auction record for the artist** - and for any Indian modern art. Souza, who died in 2002, was born in Goa and lived in Britain and America. He painted his **record-breaking picture** in London in the mid-fifties. Christie's describe that time as **the peak** of Souza's career - and the auction house says that Birth is the best painting he produced in this period.

The picture was previously in a private collection in the United States. It shows a nude woman **in labour**, lying on her back with her eyes closed **in concentration**. Standing to her left is a man who **bears a striking resemblance to** the artist himself.

The Indian art critic, Madhu Jain, says Souza's work has always **fetches high prices**. She describes him as **controversial** and **ahead of his time**, and says he was one of India's most significant artists. Now Souza's **portrayal** of a woman about to give birth has become the most valuable modern painting by an Indian artist in the world.

Jason Caffrey, BBC

Vocabulary and definitions

set a world auction record for the artist	sold at a higher price than any other Souza picture anywhere in the world
record-breaking picture	here, Birth has been sold at a higher price than any other painting by the artist
the peak	the most successful period
in labour	about to give birth (when the contractions start to push the baby out of the body)
in concentration	here, being fully focused on the process of giving birth
bears a striking resemblance to	looks very much like
fetches high prices	sold for large amounts of money
controversial	causing a lot of disagreement or argument
ahead of his time	creating work that was too modern and innovative for most of his contemporaries to understand and appreciate it; being a visionary, i.e. doing things before others have done them
portrayal	depiction, representation of something or someone (here, in a painting)

More on this story: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7452163.stm

Read and listen to the story and the vocabulary online:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/newsenglish/witn/2008/06/080616_souza_painting.shtml